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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WINTER SOUPS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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When you want a hot soup to warm the family on a cold night, remember your neighbors across the Atlantic, the French.

The French are famous for their soups. In fact, they are perhaps the most enthusiastic soup-eaters on the face of the earth. And that's not surprising. It's just another proof that the French are extra wise in the matter of foods and cooking. They're not content with dishes that simply taste delicious -- though that's a very important requirement with them. They're not even content with dishes that are both delicious and nourishing. They want their food to be economical as well. Meals that please the taste, nourish the body, and never strain the pocketbook -- that's the ideal of the thrifty French.

And that's where French soups come in. The cooks in France know how to make thin soup, thick soup, and in-between soup, how to combine odds and ends and bits of left-overs to make those hot, cheering concoctions that cost almost nothing and taste as if they cost a good deal, They know how to use bones and left-over bits of meat, and how to use the least expensive cuts to make stock or broth. Yes, and they understand the secrets of using low-cost vegetables like carrots and onions to best advantage. And they also understand how to use garden herbs like sorrel and chervil and parsley and garlic for seasoning.

One very popular French soup is called "pot-au-feu," which means pot-on-the-fire. This delicious mixture is made from meat, and vegetables and the water the vegetables were cooked in. It gently simmers down thick in one of those heavy soup pots which stands eternally on the back of the stove in many French homes. Into the "pot-au-feu" may go the bones from the Sunday roast, or a fresh soup-bone from the butcher. The clever French housewife is careful to see that the bones for soup are cracked and go into slightly salted water so that the maximum of flavor will get out into the broth. And she's careful that the pot always simmers, never boils hard, when she's making broth. To this broth foundation, she'll add the odds and ends from yesterday's meals -- perhaps a few cooked carrots or potatoes or tomatoes or some other good soup vegetable. And by the way, the water in which she boils vegetables never is thrown away. In France, it's always saved for soup or sauces. This "pot likker," as we call it in this country, contains valuable minerals as well as flavor. When it can't be served on the vegetables, it will go very nicely in the soup pot. The French cook puts in any cooked vegetables at the very last, because she knows that overcooking vegetables will spoil the fine flavor of her soup mixture. Before the soup appears on the table, she'll strain out the bones and the vegetables and add a blend of seasoning.

The French often brown raw vegetables in a little butter or other fat before they add them to the soup stock. You can see the advantage in this simple little cooking trick. It adds flavor to the vegetable -- a special flavor. And it adds a little brown color to the soup. And the additional amount of fat makes the soup a little richer. That famous thick onion soup with cheese on top, which makes such a welcome and low-cost dish for chilly-weather meals -- that soup the French make with onions browned in fat.

French onion soup is such an inexpensive and nourishing soup for winter meals that I'd like to tell you just exactly how it's done. If you want enough to serve five or six people, peel and chop up about six medium-sized onions. Chop them fine. Then cook them in about two tablespoons of butter or other fat until they turn light-brown in color. Then add about a pint of boiling water and simmer until tender. Now pour in about a quart of meat broth or stock. That meat flavor combined with the onion flavor is extra good, you know. Thicken the mixture with blended flour and cold water. Add salt and pepper and cook for a few minutes. Then pour the soup into hot soup bowls and float a slice of toast on the top of each. Now for the final touch that makes the soup so interesting and delicious. Sprinkle some sharp grated cheese over the slice of toast and all over the top of the soup. Add a dash of bright red paprika and serve. A cheerful, flavorful, meal all in one bowl.

The French are also great on another low-cost and nourishing soup made from a cheap vegetable. This is the famous lentil soup. Lentils as no doubt you know, belong to the same family as peas and beans -- the legume family. And all these legumes rank high as nourishing vegetables. In this country, we aren't as familiar with brown lentil soup as we are with split-pea soup, black bean soup, and so on. But for variety on a winter night, we might borrow a lentil-soup recipe from our neighbors across the sea. The French use onion or leeks or garlic for flavoring this soup, and they often add a little tomato for color and flavor. Also they generally add meat stock. By the way, you can make any of these legume soups with ham stock.

Well, the hearty thick soups like the cheese soups, or the legume soups, or the milk soups make better main dishes than first-course dishes. To start a meal we like a flavorsome appetizer -- a hot cupful made for its taste and looks rather than for its calories. But for inexpensive and cheering and simple cold-weather meals, for easy suppers or luncheons, the hearty soups can take the place of importance. That onion-and-cheese soup, the lentil soup made with meat broth and tomatoes and onions, and the thick "pot-au-feu," a steaming combination of meat and vegetables together -- with bread and butter these make a meal by themselves.

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